

PRELIMINARY
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
**LINCOLN COUNTY NON-MOTORIZED
TRAIL SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT AND
MAINTENANCE**

NV-040-07-36

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document identifies issues, analyzes alternatives and impacts for establishing and performing improvements to three separate trails in Lincoln County, Nevada. The trails proposed for establishment and improvements include:

Trail 1: Oak Springs Trilobite Trail

Trail 2: Caliente Area Non-Motorized Trail System

Trail 3: Stone Cabin Trail

1.1 Project Location

The proposed projects are located on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Ely Field Office, Caliente Resource Area, in Lincoln County, Nevada. Trail 1: Oak Springs Trilobite Trail is located approximately 10 miles west of Caliente, Nevada off of Oak Springs Summit. Trail 2: Caliente Area Non-Motorized Trail System is located approximately 1 mile south of Caliente, Nevada in the Clover Mountains. Trail 3: Stone Cabin Trail is located outside of Spring Valley State Park approximately 20 miles east of Pioche, Nevada.

The legal description of the identified trails are as follows:

Trail 1: Oak Springs Trilobite Trail, T 4 S, R 65 E, Sections 11, 12, 13, 14

Trail 2: Caliente Area Non-Motorized Trail System, T 4 S, R 67 E, Sections 17, 18, 19, 20

Trail 3: Stone Cabin Trail, T 32 S, R 70 E, Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18

1.2 Background and Need for the Proposal

Trail 1: The Oak Springs Summit Trilobite Beds was designated in the Caliente Management Framework Plan (MFP) of 1980. As part of this designation a parking area and trail to the trilobite beds was established. Since that time improvements were made to the parking area including installation of signs, a visitor register box, a picnic table, and fencing. Additionally, the original trail has since been designated as a portion of the Gray Dome OHV Trail in the Chief Mountain OHV Area. Currently, the route to the trilobite beds from the parking area is marked with rock cairns which are intended to guide the public to the trilobite site. However, through the visitor register box visitors to the site have indicated that they are having a hard time finding the trilobite beds and that the existing method is ineffective. Visitors have also indicated through the register box that they would like more information regarding the site. Based upon input received from the public a need exists to better facilitate visitors use of the site.

Trail 2: In March 2007, the Lincoln County Trails Coalition developed the "Lincoln County Mountain Bike Trail Assessment" and requested that the BLM implement the results of this assessment. This action is proposed in response to a need and desire by local residents and visitors for "Semi-Primitive Non-motorized" recreation opportunities as identified through this assessment. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum guidance identifies "Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized as providing "Some opportunity for isolation from the sights and sounds of man, but not as important as for primitive opportunities, and the opportunity to have a high degree of interaction with the natural environment, to have moderate challenge and risk, and to use outdoor skills."

Trail 3: The Stone Cabin Trail is an existing trail that requires maintenance. The current alignment does not allow for proper drainage which has resulted in erosion and reduced user satisfaction. A need exists to make improvements to the trail to reduce the levels of erosion that area currently occurring.

1.3 Land Use Conformance

The proposed action is in conformance with the following plans:

A) the Caliente Management Framework Plan of 1982. Objective R-2 under Recreation states: “Provide adequate access to and user facilities for important sight-seeing and recreational use areas to assure their continued enjoyment by the public.”

And is consistent with the following plans:

B) the BLM’s Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services (Purple Book) 2003, Goal 2: Ensure a Quality Experience and Enjoyment of Natural and Cultural Resources on DOI Managed or Partnered Lands and Waters. Objective 1: Manage public lands and waters for enhanced recreation experiences and quality of life. Milestone 3: Assess visitor and community resident preferences for recreation experiences and quality of life outcomes such as public health and fitness and physical education.

C) the BLM’s National Mountain Bicycling Strategic Action Plan 2002 is a comprehensive approach to addressing issues regarding mountain bicycling...on the public lands. The purpose of this Action Plan is to provide guidance to BLM field office managers and staff, interest groups, and individuals to implement on-the-ground actions and resource protection measures relative to mountain bicycle use...

D) the Ely Field Office Recreation Plan of 2001 states “The Goal” “Provide quality sustainable recreation experiences on public lands in Eastern Nevada while maintaining the health of the ecosystem.”

1.4 Issues Identified

Resource issues identified for this proposed action included:

- 1) Invasive, non-native species (including noxious weeds) concerning their spread and introduction.
- 2) Soils and concern of increased erosion due to trail construction and associated recreation use
- 3) Wild Horses and Burros concerning the impacts of recreation use.
- 4) Special Status Species/ Fish and Wildlife concerning the impacts of trail construction and associated recreation use.
- 5) Cultural, Paleontological, and Historical Resource Values and the disturbance of sites through trail construction activities and associated recreation use.
- 6) Land Uses – ROWs/withdrawals/classification and conflicts that may occur through the proposed action.

2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE(S)

2.1 Proposed Action

The Ely Field Office Bureau of Land Management is proposing to develop a network of non-motorized trails and to re-locate and maintain two existing non-motorized trails all located in Lincoln County, Nevada.

TRAIL 1 – Oak Springs Trilobite Trail

The BLM Ely Field Office proposes to develop a trail at the Oak Springs Summit Trilobite Beds and install a panel with interpretative information. The proposed trail would travel from the parking area to the trilobite beds and would be approximately 1/3 mile in length. Trail construction would follow sustainable design guidelines which include contour trail design, avoiding steep trail grades, and other erosion control measures such as reverse grade dips and rolling grade dips. Trail width would be approximately 24” in order to provide greater accessibility. Trail construction would be performed by hand or mechanized trail building equipment. A monitoring program such as Limits of Acceptable Change would be utilized to correct challenges as they show up. The interpretive panel would be installed using existing infrastructure found at the existing parking area.

TRAIL 2 – Caliente Area Non-Motorized Trail System

The BLM Ely Field Office proposes to develop a trail system for non-motorized use approximately 24 miles in length. The trail system would be constructed in two phases and would be located on land managed by the BLM and Nevada State Parks.

Approximately seven miles of trail would be constructed on BLM managed land with the remaining 17 miles constructed on lands managed by Kershaw Ryan State Park. There would be no trailhead constructed on land managed by BLM. Trails developed would be approximately 24” in width and would follow USDA Forest Service and International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) sustainable design and construction guidelines. Trails would be constructed using either hand crews or mechanized trail construction equipment.

Trail construction would follow sustainable design guidelines which include contour trail design, avoiding steep trail grades, and other erosion control measures such as reverse grade dips and rolling grade dips. Trail width would be 12”-24” depending upon the geology and desired level of challenge of the trail. The type of use anticipated includes mountain biking, hiking, and equestrian use which depending on the level of use slight levels of erosion and soil displacement is anticipated. Trail construction would be performed using hand crews or mechanized trail building equipment. A monitoring program such as Limits of Acceptable Change would be utilized to correct challenges as they show up.

Approximately 5 acres of surface would be disturbed through new trail construction. The amount of vegetation impacted in association with trail development is highly dependent upon the final alignment of the trails and the vegetation that is present. Most of the

affected vegetation in association with trail development would be limb removal from trees within the trail prism and ground level vegetation removal within the two-foot wide trail tread. All attempts would be made to minimize removal of trees for trail construction.

TRAIL 3 – Stone Cabin Trail

The BLM Ely Field Office proposes to designate and perform trail maintenance on a 2.25 mile trail that connects two recreation sites within Spring Valley State Park.

Approximately 90 percent of the trail occurs on BLM managed land, however NEPA compliance and required surveys were never performed prior to the trail being established. Maintenance items could include the following: installation of drainage control devices such as water bars and drain dips, re-routing of the trail, brushing, installation of cribbing, turnpikes, retaining walls or other trail structures, and trail tread work including establishing outslope, back slope, and trail width. Trail work would be performed by hand crews or mechanized trail construction equipment.

For all activities found in the proposed action a complete cultural resource inventory would be performed prior to ground disturbance activities. All cultural resources (except isolate artifacts which are categorically defined in the Protocol Agreement, Appendix E as not eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places) would be avoided using the guidelines set forth in the Protocol Appendix F, Section H, Roads and Trails.

The proposed action would follow established best management practices for invasive plants and noxious weeds. Invasive plant, noxious weed and pest awareness and prevention education techniques would be utilized by all means available to increase the awareness of trail users.

An inventory for the BLM sensitive plant species, Needle Mountains milkvetch (*Astragalus eurylobus*) would occur prior to ground disturbance activities. The plant typically flowers from spring to early-summer. Should this species occur within the proposed trail route, the trail would be re-routed to avoid impacts.

Riparian areas and water sources would be avoided. Trails would be designed to avoid traveling directly above or below raptor nesting sites and limiting construction in known nesting areas during nesting periods. Any construction activities for all alternatives would be surveyed for the presence of migratory bird breeding or nesting activities. No construction activities would take place in areas where breeding or nesting activities were taking place.

Trails would be monitored on a regular basis to determine the design and construction effectiveness in minimizing erosion and maintenance needs. Problems identified would be corrected in a timely manner. “Leave No Trace”, “Pack it in Pack it Out” and other user education strategies could be implemented if warranted.

2.2 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative represents the status quo – not approving or implementing the Proposed Action. No trail construction or designation of routes would occur.

2.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis

TRAIL 2 – Caliente Area Non-Motorized Trail System, All on State Parks Land
This alternative considered but eliminated would have had the complete trail system constructed entirely on Nevada State Parks land. There is limited land available within the state park, even with its expansion under the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act (2004). The limited amount of available land for trail system development would not provide an adequate amount of trail mileage desired by the recreating public and the purpose and need of the proposed action.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The affected environment is the physical area that bounds the environmental, sociological, economic, or cultural feature of interest that could be impacted by the Proposed Action.

<u>Critical Elements</u>	<u>Not Present or Negligible Impact</u>	<u>Present and Not Affected</u>	<u>Present and Affected</u>	<u>Rationale</u>
Area of Critical Environmental Concern	Not Present			
Air Quality	Negligible Impact			The nature of the proposed action and the associated use is anticipated to have a negligible impact to air quality.
Cultural		X		Mitigation identified in the proposed action would have result in no direct impacts to cultural resources. Indirect Impacts could include “looting” of sites by trail users.

Environmental Justice	Not Present			
Floodplains	Not Present			
Waste (Hazardous or Solid)	Not Present			
Invasive, Non-Native Species	Negligible Impact			Mitigation identified in the proposed action combined with minimal levels of ground disturbance activities would result in negligible impacts to invasive, non-native species
Native American Religious		X		No concerns were identified through consultation.
Prime or Unique Farmlands	Not Present			
Riparian – Wetland Zones	Not Present			
Special Status Plant and Animal Species		X		Mitigation identified in the proposed action would result in minimal impacts to special status species.
Water Quality	Not Present			
Wild and Scenic Rivers	Not Present			
Wilderness Study Areas	Not Present			
Non-Critical Elements				
Land Use Authorizations		X		There would no modifications to land use authorizations through the

				proposed action therefore no impact would occur.
Paleontological Resources		X		The trilobite site is an established fossil collection area so through the proposed action there would be little if any increased impact to the resource above the current condition.
Minerals		X		There would be no modifications to minerals resources through the proposed action therefore no impact would occur.
Visual Resources		X		The proposed action would fall within VRM classifications for the area therefore no impact to visual resources would occur.
Soils	Negligible Impacts			Mitigation identified in the proposed action combined with minimal ground disturbance activities would result in negligible impacts to soil resources.
Recreation	Negligible Impacts			Due to the minimal level of

				development proposed, impacts to recreation resources beyond those described in Section 1.2 are anticipated to be negligible.
Range	Negligible Impacts			Due to the minimal level of improvements and ground disturbances proposed, impacts to range resources are anticipated to be negligible.
Vegetation	Negligible Impacts			Less than 5 acres, of vegetation would be impacted. The linear quality of the proposed action would not result in more than negligible disruption of any particular vegetative community.
Wildlife	Negligible Impacts			Mitigation identified in the proposed action combined with minimal level of improvements and ground disturbances proposed, impacts to wildlife resources are anticipated to be

				negligible.
Woodland Resources	Negligible Impacts			Due to the minimal level of improvements and ground disturbances proposed, impacts to woodland resources are anticipated to be negligible.
Socioeconomics	Negligible Impacts			Due to the minimal level of development proposed, impacts to socioeconomic resources are anticipated to be negligible.
Migratory Birds		X		Mitigation identified in the proposed action combined with minimal ground disturbance activities would result in negligible impacts to migratory bird resources.
Wild Horses and Burros		X		Increased human presence would cause temporary disturbance to behavior patterns as horses habituated to the presence of humans in the area but impacts are anticipated to be negligible.

For all of the critical and non-critical elements impacts are anticipated to be either negligible, no impacts are anticipated, or the element is not present. Therefore, a more thorough detailed analysis of environmental consequences is not warranted.

4. CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

Cumulative impacts result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts could result from individually minor, but collectively significant actions, taking place over a period of time (Council on Environmental Quality, Regulations for Implementation of NEPA, 1508.7).

According to the BLM publication, Guidelines for Accessing and Documenting Cumulative Impacts (1994), the analysis can be focused on those issues and resource values identified during scoping that are of major importance. No major issues were identified during scoping, therefore no cumulative impacts are anticipated and a more detailed analysis is not warranted.

5. PROPOSED MITIGATION AND MONITORING

As previously outlined mitigation measures incorporated into the proposed action are sufficient and based on the analysis of environmental consequences no additional mitigation is proposed.

6. CONSULTATION, COORDINATION, AND LIST OF PREPARERS

6.1 Consultation and Coordination

The following groups and agencies were consulted and/or coordinated with during the development of this project:

- Lincoln County Trails Coalition
- Nevada Department of Wildlife

6.2 List of Preparers

The following persons participated directly in the preparation of this document:

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